

NASA, some of my constituents and some of my heroes, who devote their lives to doing the impossible for our Nation and our world, will spend the next decade and more on a technological and visionary quest: To send and resend the shuttle fleet into space to complete the International Space Station; to examine with unprecedented vigor and precision in the galaxy's preeminent laboratory the long-term exposure of the human body to microgravity and radiation; to design and construct the next generation of American spacecraft; to return to the moon; and to plot and endeavor a manned mission to Mars.

The exploration of the unknown is one of the innate motivating forces of our species. That universal and ancient yearning will be satisfied today by NASA's heroic "corps of discovery" in a mission not to conquer space, but to conquer human ignorance.

The darkness will be lighted, and this afternoon seven heroes will carry the torch of human discovery into the void.

Our future in space is still unknown and unknowable: The station remains incomplete, the moon is still years away, and Mars is still a red speck in the night sky, but today's launch is a step toward our destiny.

And like all steps into the unknown, the voyage of *Discovery*, T-minus 5 hours and 40 minutes, will prove the next giant leap in "the most hazardous and dangerous and greatest adventure on which man has ever embarked."

VETERAN FUNDING SHORTFALL

(Mr. SALAZAR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Speaker, as a veteran, I have made a pledge to serve my country, and because of my desire to defend the ideals of democracy that I still cherish.

As part of our commitment, the Army promised all veterans a variety of benefits. In the past several years, I have seen some of those promises turn from honored commitments to veterans and their families to empty words that seem to be worth nothing more than the paper they are written on.

Mr. Speaker, 2 weeks ago, we were informed the Veterans Administration would fall short by more than a billion dollars of what is needed to provide critical services to veterans. I was angered and dismayed at this gross negligence and oversight and spoke before this very House in strong support of the emergency spending bill passed 2 weeks ago.

We will soon be seeing another request from the President to complete the needed funding for the health care of our Nation's veterans. I will support this measure too because I support our veterans, but it is absurd and it is a crying shame that the health of veterans boils down to bitter partisan fights.

As Democrats, we have repeatedly demanded full funding for our veterans' needs. It is our duty to fully fund the Veterans Administration and do it right the first time, not after three or four attempts.

WELCOMING ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

(Mr. POE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, birth is a happy event for all peoples. We rejoice because we hope that child will make the world better. Every time a child is born, the Good Lord is making a bet on the future of mankind. We do not pick our parents, and we do not get to pick the country of our birth. And we who are born in the U.S.A. are the most fortunate of all people in the history of the world.

Last night in Waco, Texas, about the time the sun was going down, 8:29 p.m., Elizabeth Lenna Alexander was born, 7 pounds 3 ounces, July 12, 2005. The world she has been born into is full of the good and the not so good.

Our country must always be willing to protect the greatest resource, the innocent of our country, the soul of our future, our children.

It is my hope that her parents, Kara and Shane Alexander, will raise Elizabeth with a sense of justice and compassion, community, courage, and a deep sense and concern for liberty.

So Elizabeth, as your grandfather, I welcome you to the U.S.A. Make it a better place, a place of more freedom.

URGING CANDOR ON IRAQ

(Mr. EMANUEL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, you cannot solve a problem if you do not acknowledge that you have a problem. In that light, I appreciate and applaud the comments of outgoing Under Secretary of Defense Doug Feith made to the Washington Post concerning the costly mistakes made in Iraq.

During a recent interview, Mr. Feith said, "It is an extremely complex judgment to know whether the course that we chose with its pros and cons was more sensible."

Further, he noted the transfer of power to Iraqis did not happen fast enough and that we were not able to train the Iraqis.

Mr. Feith's comments stand in contrast to the President's inability and unwillingness to acknowledge any errors made in the Iraq war effort.

The administration did a great job planning for a quick victory on the battlefield and for occupation, yet things have not turned out as planned. Some of today's challenges are a direct result of those mistakes made by the administration.

After 1,800 American lives, more than 10,000 wounded American GIs and \$340 billion with no end in sight, now is the time to level with the American people. If we are going to be successful, we must work together, and to work together, you must be frank and honest.

Mr. Feith, thank you for your recent candor. Mr. President, we can do it. We are here to help, but it starts with truth and candor.

UTILIZING THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

(Mr. SHIMKUS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, how do you haul corn, soybeans, fertilizer, petroleum products, coal and rock from Chicago, Illinois, to the port of New Orleans, or from the port of New Orleans up to Chicago, Illinois, without taking 870 tractor-trailer trucks over our highway system? That is 870 trucks that burn diesel fuel, 870 trucks that clog our interstate highway system, 870 trucks that made some of our roads less safe.

Mr. Speaker, you do it by the river, by the Mississippi River system. That is one of the best ways in which we can be an environmental steward, by getting all of these trucks off the road. That is one of the best ways that we can unclog our highway and transportation system. That is one of the best ways that we get a better return on investments and lower price fuels is by doing that.

The Water Resources Development Act, which we will take up on the floor this afternoon and tomorrow, is the best way to be a good environmental steward, energy security, and promote the well-being of all Americans. I ask Members support for passage.

VALERIE PLAME'S IDENTITY

(Mr. MCGOVERN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, when news broke early this week that Karl Rove was involved in the outing of CIA agent Valerie Plame, it was clear that either Karl Rove had been withholding his involvement from the White House, or that the White House knew of his involvement and falsely allowed the public to believe he had no role in the scandal.

This Congress should be outraged by Mr. Rove's involvement and should be demanding answers from both him and the White House. I would like to know when exactly, if ever, President Bush was told of Mr. Rove's involvement. If the President did indeed know, that means that the White House is involved in a coverup which should be investigated by this House.

Mr. Rove's actions are a major abuse of power. Valerie Plame was a covert

CIA agent stationed in many hot spots around the world. When someone in the White House decided to leak her name to reporters, they were not only jeopardizing Plame's life, but also the lives of other covert agents she has been in contact with.

Mr. Speaker, House Republicans should be concerned about whether or not this White House has been spreading this information. The only way we can get answers is by conducting a congressional investigation. It is time that this Congress do its job.

SPACE SHUTTLE LAUNCH

(Mr. PRICE of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, 2 years ago, the Nation mourned the space shuttle *Columbia* tragedy. President Bush declared, "This cause of exploration and discovery is not an option we choose, it is a desire written in the human heart."

Today, seven more astronauts will take hold of that desire and follow their heart into space. This return to flight marks a new era of space travel with unparalleled safety measures. As the crew tests new safety techniques and delivers much-needed supplies to the International Space Station, we will all watch. We will watch with excitement and pride, and we will remember. We will remember and honor the lost crew of the space shuttle *Columbia*.

The *Columbia* crewmembers valiantly gave their lives pursuing knowledge in our name for space exploration and today, we continue our quest to get our shuttle program back.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to those who worked so hard to get that shuttle program back. To today's crewmembers, Eileen Collins, James Kelly, Charles Camarda, Wendy Lawrence, Soichi Noguchi, Steve Robinson, and Andy Thomas, may they be safe and may their mission be successful. We thank them for their dedication, their determination, and their courage. Godspeed.

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SOCIAL SECURITY PRIVATIZATION

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, early this year the President said, "There's no Social Security trust." Lately, some White House supporters in this Congress say they want to establish private accounts with money from the same trust fund which the President says does not exist. That way, when favored Wall Street interests take the money from the administration's private accounts and lose it in stock speculation, they can turn around and tell the American people, "Hey, the money was never there to begin with."

There is a line in the Bible which says, "That which is crooked cannot be made straight." Think about that line when you think about Social Security privatization.

AMERICA'S FLOURISHING ECONOMY

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, Fridays are turning out to be a great day for American workers for more than one reason. Last Friday, the Department of Labor announced that over 146,000 new jobs were created for American workers in June. Over the last 25 consecutive months, 3.7 million Americans have gone to work due to President Bush's tax cuts. Additionally, the national unemployment rate has dropped over the past year to 5 percent, which represents the fastest decline in nearly a decade. More Americans are working now than ever before in our Nation's history and our tax receipts continue to rise as the Federal deficit continues to steadily decline. The Congressional Budget Office now predicts that our deficit may fall to under \$325 billion. Friday's job reports continue to bring positive news for American families and prove that President Bush's tax cuts are moving the economy forward.

In conclusion, God bless our troops and we will never forget September 11.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE FUNDING

(Mr. EDWARDS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, it has now been 13 days since the House could have passed a \$1.5 billion emergency VA health care spending bill to address the VA health care crisis in America. Unfortunately for millions of America's veterans, the House leadership refused to pass the bipartisan bill that the Senate had already passed by a vote of 96-0. We could have already had help on the way, but the House leadership said no.

Yesterday, the VA confirmed what House Democrats said on this floor 13 days ago, the House leadership-backed VA bill does not fully address the VA health care crisis. Every day that goes by is a day when veterans are either having their important health care delayed or canceled. The House Republican leadership caused this VA health care crisis by underfunding VA health care for 2 years. Now they have a responsibility to deal with it.

Now I hear the House leadership says we might be on vacation this Friday. What is more important, Members of the House taking a vacation this Friday or addressing the needs of America's veterans?

VETERANS HEALTH CARE FUNDING

(Mr. BUYER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I would say that my good friend from Texas's 1-minute is very unfortunate because, CHET, you and I are working together. We are working with your colleague, Chairman WALSH, to find the right number. And so to try to say that, gee, there is a bogeyman, there is a bad person here, that is false. What we are looking for, CHET, is to get the right number.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The Chair would advise Members that they should address their remarks to the Chair and not to other Members either in the second person or by given name.

Mr. BUYER. I can address the Chair, but I think we know who we are talking to.

I am hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that the gentleman who just spoke will be very careful, because we are trying to work together to get the right number. I think it is an embarrassing moment. When we ask the administration for the number, they testify to a number, and then we find that it is not right potentially? We are trying to get the number right and to make sure that veterans are served properly on a bipartisan basis. Please, let us not erode that.

VA FUNDING SHORTFALL

(Mr. EVANS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, 2 weeks ago the administration told Congress that the VA health care system did not need any more money. Then, feeling the heat, they said they needed an additional \$975 million. Just yesterday, the Bush administration conceded that it had made another mistake. Now they say they need another \$300 million. It is clear that either the administration cannot get it right or does not want to get it right. The nearly \$1.3 billion that the administration now admits is necessary this year is the amount Democrats have been working hard for this last year. The Republican leadership has consistently fought adequate increases in the VA health care budget. Now, more than 50,000 veterans are coming to health care appointments and being denied care. It is time to stop nickel-and-diming veterans health care and give the veterans of this country what they need and deserve.

POSITIVE ECONOMIC NEWS

(Mrs. BLACKBURN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)